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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

It’s been another one of those long and tiring weeks here in the Northeast! The weather has been up and down, almost literally. While the worst of it occurred last week with the numerous tornadoes that struck central and western Massachusetts, we’ve experienced some heavy-duty thunderstorms over this past week, spawned by temperatures in the 90’s. And now we’re getting ready to settle down a little bit, hopefully.

I know we haven’t seen Joe’s column for a number of weeks, but he is alive and fairly well. He’s going through some medical issues, trying to determine what’s ailing him and find some relief. Hopefully we’ll see him back in these pages in the very near future.

And speaking of medical issues, I hope to see some relief from some of my own next week. I’m scheduled for a surgical procedure, a spinal injection, next week. The goal is to relieve some of the pressure caused by some degeneration in some of my vertebrae, and get rid of a lot of pain in my back and leg. Not looking forward to the procedure, but I am hoping that it will be successful!

So, while the both of us try to get back to some semblance of 100%, we’ll let you all enjoy another week of A-ONE!

Until next time...

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New MyMAIL Version 1.95

Hello all,

New version of MyMail 1.95 is released.

After a year as student I finally got time over to release
a new version of MyMail.

I have now left the old work as programmer and electronics engineer

and will work as a traindriver.
http://erikhall.mine.nu/~erikhall/images/ErikKorMa828Mini.jpg

As usual, I will continue the programming of MyMail when there is time over.

Major improvements & bugfixes:

- Re-design of how weekday is calculated.
- Bug fix of timer event handler.
- Corrections of charset code
- TCP corrections
- Time zone corrections
- Fixed deadlock problem in editable fields
and lost of minor corrections.

Read more in the history.txt file.

Download from:
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http://erikhall.mine.nu/~erikhall/programs/mymail.html

Best Regards
Erik Hall

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Wii Successor To Dominate E3 Expo?
Sony Unveils Next-Gen 'Vita'!
'Duke Nukem Forever' Finally Launches!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Nintendo's Wii Successor To Dominate E3 Expo

Almost six years ago at the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo, Nintendo unveiled what would eventually become known as the Wii. But the Japanese gaming giant didn't show off the new console's distinctive motion-sensing capabilities until later that year at the Tokyo Game Show. Nintendo won't be such a tease at this year's E3.

After two years of shrinking Wii sales, the gamemaker will fully raise the curtain on the Wii's successor at the gaming industry's annual

convention in downtown Los Angeles this week. Nintendo Co. has remained silent about just what the doodad will do, but gamers are anticipating features like high-definition graphics and touchscreen controllers.

"What's interesting about it is that it's a platform that seems much more oriented to the core gamer, in terms of its capabilities and specifications," said Ken Levine, the Irrational Games creative director who will tear into E3 with "Bioshock Infinite," an airy in-the-clouds follow-up to the stylish undersea saga "Bioshock," published by 2K Games.

Meanwhile, Sony Corp. will try to rebound from the embarrassment of a massive security breach that recently crippled the PlayStation Network, affecting more than 100 million online accounts. Sony plans to introduce several new PlayStation 3 titles, as well as detail the name, price and sale date of a new hand-held device code-named Next Generation Portable.

John Koller, director of PlayStation hardware marketing, said the NGP will be slightly larger than the PlayStation Portable and will feature a touchscreen, touchpad, two cameras and an accelerometer, meaning it can react to motion. It will also be able to connect over cellphone networks and Wi-Fi hotspots and use GPS location-tracking technology.

"The NGP is not a singular experience as a lot of other portable and mobile devices are," said Koller. "There's augmented reality, location-based and social gaming experiences. All those things add up to a much greater whole than what we think is available on the market or will be on the market over the next four to five years."

Following last year's flashy Cirque du Soleil production to introduce Kinect, the motion-sensing camera system for Xbox 360, Microsoft Corp. will likely take a different tactic than Nintendo and Sony and keep the focus on new games instead of new devices. The gaming industry's current champion hasn't announced any plans to debut a new console.

The most explosive battle for hype will involve Electronic Arts vs. Activision, who will simultaneously use E3 as a theater for their military shoot-'em-up franchises. Activision Blizzard Inc. aims to continue to dominate with the globe-trotting "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3," while Electronic Arts Inc. hopes to capture interest with "Battlefield 3."

"These are the type of heavyweight fights that I think are good for customers and the marketplace," said Frank Gibeau, president of EA Games. "It brings a lot of attention, gets people excited and gives customers a choice. We like our chances. We're an underdog, for sure. They're the big kids on the block, but we're giving it everything we've got."

Other games scheduled to be on display on the show floor include the third-person alien blaster "Gears of War 3," sweeping role-playing game "The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim," moody Dark Knight sequel "Batman: Arkham City," ambitious zombie slasher "Dead Island," virtual demolition derby "Twisted Metal" and violent shape-shifting adventure "Prototype 2."

"E3 is still one of the largest showcases for all games out there," said Jonathan Lim, a Radical Entertainment assistant producer currently working on "Prototype 2," published by Activision. "For us to be able to have such a large presence is really rewarding. I personally haven't been part of something that's going to be so large at E3."

Several unannounced games are rumored to be making their debut at this year's E3, including a 3-D "Super Mario" game for the Nintendo 3DS, new installments of choreography game "Dance Central" and supernatural thriller "Alan Wake" and a "Star Wars" title that utilizes Xbox 360's Kinect system to transform players' movements into the powers of The Force.

The convention will also serve as a celebration for the gaming industry, which has been bouncing back in the wake of the recession and rise of inexpensive social and casual games. The NPD Group, a research firm that tracks sales, said last month that the U.S. sales of consoles, software and accessories were up 20 percent over last year to $961.2 million.

While mobile gamemakers like Gameloft and EA Mobile will be at E3, casual gaming giants like Rovio and Zynga, the creators of "Angry Birds" and "FarmVille," as well as Apple Inc., aren't expected to have a presence at the show. The iPhone and iPad maker is throwing its own party in San Francisco this week: Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference.

"I think the mood at this year's E3 will be healthy," said Adam Sessler, editorial director and co-host of G4's "X-Play." "The gaming industry has been wandering in the forest a little bit in regards to this whole causal gaming thing. This might be a year of refocusing on the style of games and attention to the audience that has supported the industry."

Sony Unveils Next-Gen Portable Device 'Vita'

Sony Corp. on Monday took the wraps off its next generation portable gaming machine, PlayStation Vita, a touch-interface and motion-sensitive handheld that outdoes its workhorse PlayStation Portable and will go on sale before the winter holidays. Company executives have called the device Sony's biggest product launch since the PlayStation 3 five years ago.

The device will allow gamers to be connected with one another over cellphone networks and Wi-Fi hotspots, and use GPS location-tracking technology. In the U.S., Sony is partnering exclusively with AT&T Inc. for cellphone service.

The device, available for $249 for its Wi-Fi-only version, was unveiled at the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's annual convention known as E3. A version that will also have cellphone service will retail for $299, and buyers will have to subscribe to a cellular data plan.

The handheld has front and back cameras, a touchscreen in front, a touch pad on the back and two knob-like joysticks. It will enable gamers to play against people using PlayStation 3 consoles over the Internet-based PlayStation Network, a system that was recently restored after being shut down due to a massive hacking attack.

Sony apologized again for the outage and said since the network was restored, activity is back to 90 percent of the pre-attack level.

The hardware comes with an accelerometer, which means it will also react to being held at different angles and being moved through the air.

"PlayStation Vita will revolutionize the portable entertainment experience," Kazuo Hirai, group chief executive officer of Sony Computer

Entertainment Inc., told a crowd of 6,000 at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena. "The whole world is really in play."

The Vita is slightly bigger than the PlayStation Portable, which has sold more than 70 million units worldwide since its launch in 2004. The PSP will continue to be sold along with new games.

But the Vita - code-named "NGP," or next generation portable, until Monday - will enable gamers to do more.

A Sony staffer demonstrated a version of "Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception," in which he used the familiar buttons and knobs but also touched the screen to move the Drake avatar across ledges and attack opponents in close combat.

Another game called "Reality Fighters" will allow users to take a picture and have fighting characters battle each other using objects from the real world.

Along with social games and email, Sony also unveiled a communication service it called "Party" that will enable voice and text chat during games or when using the Web browser.

Users will also be able to sense when other gamers are nearby, what games they have played recently, and enable in-game gifting of virtual items.

Sony was the latest technology company to make a big bet on connected-everywhere services, following Apple Inc.'s presentation Monday in San Francisco of its iCloud storage service, which will allow consumers to access their photos, music and documents on distant servers.

"Cloud is where everything is headed," said Ricardo Torres, editor-in-chief of GameSpot.com. "This is certainly the attempt by Sony to make sure they're not left behind."

Sony also introduced a range of new 3-D games such as "Resistance 3," a traditional shooter game, in a big push to make it a leader in the format. It is bundling the PS3 game with a pair of 3-D glasses and a 24-inch 3-D monitor for $499, a price far lower than most 3-D displays on the market.

Sony's array of new 3-D games and the Vita itself are directed at so-called core gamers, who are focused on serious action and effects.

But in a reflection of the growing popularity of games that make use of iPad and iPhone touch screens and Apple's iOS operating system, like the addictive "Angry Birds," Sony also said Monday it would put PlayStation games onto smartphones that run on Google Inc.'s competing Android operating system.

It called the service focused on such casual gamers "PlayStation Suite" and said further details would be announced in the coming months.

"Smartphones and tablets have really created a large market for casual gaming," Hirai said in an interview after Sony's presentation. "We want to make sure we're in both areas."

Nintendo Debuts Touchscreen Wii Successor

Nintendo has introduced the world to the Wii’s touchy new big brother: the Wii U.

The Japanese gaming giant on Tuesday unveiled the Wii video game console’s successor, which will broadcast high-definition video and feature a touchscreen controller that can detect motion and interact with what appears on a television display.

"Up until now, home console games had to occupy the TV screen in order to be played," said Nintendo president Satoru Iwata. "The new controller for Wii U, with its 6.2-inch screen built in, means you won’t need to give up your gameplay when someone else comes in the room and wants to watch a TV program."

The white touchscreen controller, reminiscent of Apple Inc.’s iPad and other tablet computers, can broadcast standard-definition video but also features a directional pad, microphone, dual analog sticks, speakers, two pairs of shoulder buttons and a front-facing camera, which can be used to make video calls.

The console itself will use proprietary high-definition optical discs, 1080p HDMI output and internal memory that can be upgraded with USB and SD technology. No other technical specifications were provided.

The prototype controller was demonstrated during the Electronic Entertainment Expo, the gaming industry’s annual convention, in several ways: displaying a player’s inventory in a "Legend of Zelda" game, offering an alternative way to play a chasing game, being used as a shield from incoming attacks in a first-person shooter game and showing the image of a teed-up golf ball on the ground before it was struck to a putting green depicted on a TV.

The controller was also shown being used to browse the Internet both on a TV and the controller. Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America president, noted that the touchscreen controller is not meant to be a portable gaming device and that the system is dubbed the Wii U because its "unique, unifying and maybe even utopian."

Nintendo said the Wii U will be released between April and December next year and will be backward-compatible with Wii games and controllers.

"Smash Brothers," "Darksiders II," "Batman: Arkham City," "Tekken," "Assassin’s Creed" and "Metro: Last Light" were among the titles announced that would be released for the system.

The price for Wii U was not revealed.

The unveiling of the Wii U comes after two years of slumping sales for Nintendo’s Wii, which remains the overall top-selling home video game console against Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox 360 and Sony Corp.’s PlayStation 3. Those consoles already feature high-definition graphics and added motion-sensing capabilities similar to the Wii last year with their respective Kinect and Move camera systems.

Nintendo’s Task: The Wii, Again, More, Better

The upcoming Wii U - part tablet computer, part game machine - could help Nintendo surpass its rivals once again.

Yet investors so far are skeptical, with unknowns such as the price. The company's stock has fallen 10 percent since the Wii U's unveiling this week. Expectations for the new machine have been high following the original Wii's roaring success.

Wii U, which will go on sale next year, features a motion-sensing controller with a tablet-like touch screen and high-definition graphics.

Of these, only the tablet screen feature will be unique to the Wii U. Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 already offer high-definition and motion controls.

Scott Steinberg, CEO of video game consulting company TechSavvy Global, said people were expecting an innovation that's "so far ahead of the competition that it can position Nintendo as a leader again."

Instead, he said, people got "a whimper, not a scream."

Then again, people were also skeptical in 2006, when Nintendo Co. went against conventional wisdom with its Wii. The quirky, cheap game console relied not on high-end graphics and complex buttons to lure in hardcore players, but on simple motion controls to lure in everyone.

The Wii's then-revolutionary technology lets players stand up and bowl, play tennis and drive a virtual car simply by flailing a wand in front of their TV. It has sold more than 86 million units, at least 30 million more than either the PlayStation 3 or the Xbox 360.

Whether Wii U will replicate the Wii's success or fade like the Virtual Boy (if you don't remember it, it's for good reason) will depend largely on its price.

Nintendo will also have to convince customers that they need another dedicated gaming device in the age of iPads, Facebook and "Angry Birds."

"People are getting harder to impress," Steinberg said. "They are expecting more for the money. They already have a number of systems in their home that are performing well."

With Wii U, Nintendo is catching up with its rival console makers by offering a system that runs high-definition graphics, an essential feature in 2011. Sony and Microsoft also began selling their own motion controllers late last year.

The Wii U's tablet-like controller, however, is novel. Although Nintendo says the idea behind it came long before the iPad's debut in April 2010, the ensuing tablet craze couldn't hurt.

Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter called the console brilliant and believes Nintendo will have no problem selling it, as long as it costs less than $300.

"I was really, really surprised at the stock price reaction," Pachter said. "I thought it was really cool."

Pachter said he had to hold the device in his hands before understanding its significance: "They integrated a tablet into a console."

No one else has done that.

The Wii U's controller is a mix between Nintendo's family of DS touch-screen handhelds, complete with stylus, and a traditional console game controller with two joysticks and trigger buttons. It's a little bulky - a bit like holding a hardcover book by its top and bottom edges.

In Nintendo's demonstrations at E3, a game called "Shield Pose" has players blocking suction-cup arrows fired by pirates from different directions in rhythm to a beat. The accelerometer inside the controller knows if you are blocking in the right direction.

Other games make use of the controller's ability to have a different perspective on the same world. In one, the Wii U controller operates a spaceship and is in a shoot-em-up battle with players on the ground. Those players, holding traditional controllers, have to look at a split-screen view on the TV for their perspective.

In offering new experiences through the Wii U, "not only do we want to bring back those people who have left Nintendo, we also want to create a new group of core users," said Katsuya Eguchi, manager and producer of software development at Nintendo.

"I think we can do that with the new controller, but it will be hard to bring back those people who've moved onto Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, unless we offer something a little bit different," he said in Japanese through a translator at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.

Some analysts worry that traditional video games have to compete for attention and dollars with smarter-than-ever phones, quick games such as "FarmVille" and tablet computers including the iPad.

That is not necessarily true.

Clicking on a field of virtual crops to harvest on "FarmVille" is not quite the same as spending two hours as U.S. special forces fighting Cold War-era enemies in "Call of Duty: Black Ops." It's not the same as immersing yourself in the Mushroom Kingdom with the Super Mario brothers.

Nonetheless, demand for the Wii has dropped in recent years.

Even the much-hyped Nintendo 3DS, the glasses-free handheld 3-D gaming system, has been selling slower than expected. Pachter believes a big reason for Nintendo's stock price drop this week is not Wii U but Sony's decision to price PlayStation Vita, its newest handheld gaming device at $249, the same as the 3DS.

With the economy that's still on the rocks, money speaks. The lack of an announced price for Wii U, Pachter said, "makes people worried that it'll be 500 bucks."

'Duke Nukem Forever' Finally Launches

It may have seemed like forever, but "Duke Nukem Forever," the shooter game

first announced in 1997, has finally arrived.

Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., which publishes the game, launched in Europe and Australia on Friday. The game debuts on Tuesday in the U.S., Canada and Mexico for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PCs.

Despite the long wait, the game launched to tepid reception from critics. The website Metacritic.com, which aggregates reviews, gave the Xbox 360 version a score of 55 out of 100. The game did better on the PC with a "metascore" of 76 out of 100. There is no score currently available for the PS3 version.

After promising for years that the game would be released "when it’s done," its developer 3D Realms closed up shop in 2009 citing lack of funding.

The game was resurrected by Randy Pitchford, the founder of Gearbox Software, the developer of "Borderlands," which is also published by Take-Two.

Spain Arrests Anonymous Members over Sony Attack

Spanish police arrested three men suspected to be members of the hacker group Anonymous on Friday, charging them with organizing cyber attacks against the websites of Sony Corp, banks and governments - but not the recent massive hacking of PlayStation gamers.

Anonymous responded by threatening to retaliate for the arrests: "We are Legion, so EXPECT US," the group said on its official Twitter feed.

Spanish police alleged the three "hacktivists" helped organize an attack that temporarily shuttered access to some Sony websites. They were not linked to two massive cyber attacks against Sony’s Playstation Network that resulted in the theft of information from more than 100 million customers.

Police also accused the men of launching cyber assaults on Spanish banks BBVA and Bankia, and Italian energy group Enel SpA.

The arrests are the first in Spain against alleged members of Anonymous, following the detention of others in the United States and Britain. Police told Reuters all three men were Spanish and in their 30s. One worked in the merchant navy.

Anonymous is a loose grouping of self-proclaimed hactivists who frequently try to shut down the websites of businesses and other organizations that it opposes.

Its members describe themselves as Internet freedom fighters and have previously brought down websites of the Church of Scientology, as well as Amazon.com Inc, MasterCard Inc and others they saw as hostile to WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange.

Anonymous members cripple websites by overwhelming them with traffic in what is commonly known as "denial of service" attacks. The group publicizes these campaigns on the Web, giving supporters the information to attack a targeted site.

The group is currently sponsoring attacks to shut down Turkish government websites in a protest against Internet censorship. Attempts to reach the group by email were not immediately successful.

To date, the group has not been linked to crimes for financial profit.

Spanish police said the accused, who were arrested in Almeria, Barcelona and Alicante, were guilty of coordinated computer hacking attacks from a server set up in a house in Gijon in the north of Spain.

The Spanish police said members of Anonymous, known for wearing Guy Fawkes masks made popular by the graphic novel "V for Vendetta," had also hacked government sites in Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Iran, Chile, Colombia and New Zealand.

"They are structured in independent cells and make thousands of simultaneous attacks using infected ’zombie’ computers worldwide. This is why NATO considers them a threat to the military alliance," the police said in a statement.

"They are even capable of collapsing a country’s administrative structure."

The police did not rule out further arrests.

Sony PlayStation spokesman Dan Race declined to comment on the arrests on Friday.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FBI Partner Attacked by Hackers, Passwords Taken

Nearly 180 passwords belonging to members of an Atlanta-based FBI partner organization have been stolen and leaked to the Internet, the group confirmed Sunday.

The logins belonged to members of the local chapter of InfraGard, a public-private partnership devoted to sharing information about threats to U.S. physical and Internet infrastructure, the chapter’s president told The Associated Press.

"Someone did compromise the website," InfraGard Atlanta Members Alliance President Paul Farley said in a brief email exchange. "We do not at this time know how the attack occurred or the method used to reveal the passwords."

Copies of the passwords - which appear to include users from the U.S. Army, cybersecurity organizations and major communications companies - were posted to the Internet by online hacking collective Lulz Security,

which has claimed credit for a string of attacks in the past week.

In a statement, Lulz Security also claimed to have used one of the passwords to steal nearly 1,000 work and personal emails from the chief executive of Wilmington, Delaware-based Unveillance LLC.

Lulz Security claimed it was acting in response to a recent report that the Pentagon was considering whether to classify some cyberattacks as acts of war.

The FBI said Sunday that it was aware of the incident and that steps were being taken to mitigate the damage. Farley said InfraGard's website had been taken down and that members had been advised to change their passwords and beware of further attacks.

Farley added that his group - a volunteer organization - had had no previous involvement with Lulz Security, which describes itself as a collective of hackers who attack weakly-protected websites for fun. Lulz is a reference to Internetspeak for "laugh out loud."

The collective appears to have had a busy week.

Earlier Sunday, Nintendo said it had been targeted in a recent online data attack claimed by Lulz Security. Nintendo said no personal or company information was lost.

On Thursday, Lulz Security boasted of a major breach which saw as many as tens of thousands of Sony users' details posted to the Internet.

The group has also claimed credit for defacing the PBS website after the public television broadcaster aired a documentary seen as critical of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Emails and other messages seeking comment from the group over the past few days have gone unanswered, although it maintains an active presence on microblogging site Twitter, where it taunts its opponents and promises more hacks.

Latest Data Breach Strikes at Financial Security

Citigroup's disclosure that the names, account numbers and email addresses of 200,000 of its credit card customers were stolen strikes at the core of modern-day financial life - the ways people buy groceries and pay the power bill.

It's only the latest major data breach. In just the past three months, hackers have penetrated 100 million Sony PlayStation accounts, the networks of Lockheed Martin and the customer email databases of a company that does marketing for Best Buy and Target.

But half of all Americans, 154 million people, have a credit card. The Citi attack is a reminder that the technology used to protect their information was built by humans, security analyst Jacob Jegher notes - and it can be breached by humans, too.

"People rely on the safety net of a bank to take care of their information," says Jegher, a senior analyst at Celent, a research firm

that focuses on information technology in the financial industry. "Unfortunately, that net has a lot of holes."

Citi says all of the customers whose information was stolen will receive a notification letter, and most of them will get a new card, although it has declined to say exactly how many. The bank says its enforcement division and authorities are investigating.

The victims will have to endure the hassle of updating the credit card numbers on any number of online accounts, but they probably won't lose any money. For one thing, federal laws protect credit card customers from fraud beyond $50, and in most cases, the bank that issues the card will cover up to that amount.

And the Citi hackers didn't get to the three-digit numbers that appear on the backs of credit cards, a security feature known as the CVV code. That means the hackers, or whoever they might sell the information to, would have trouble making direct charges.

The danger is that someone might use the information that was compromised to mount a sophisticated "phishing" attack, in which criminals send out convincingly designed emails pretending to be from the bank and gain access to account information.

The relatively small number of accounts taken from Citi, which has 21 million credit card customers in North America, suggests the hackers used spyware that captured the data of customers who logged in to its website to conduct online banking, one expert says.

"The thing in the Citi case which is good is they detected it quickly and shut it down," says Dave Jevans, chairman of security firm IronKey Inc. and chairman of an anti-phishing nonprofit group made up of 2,000 government agencies and companies, including Citi.

"They've got systems that are going to look at the data leaving the network and are able to see that somebody's sending information out," he adds. Banks are ahead of most other industries in this regard, he explains, and other businesses will have to catch up.

CVV codes can't be stored with a simple magnetic swipe of a credit card, and the businesses that process payments are not allowed to store the codes after a transaction, so they provide another defense against fraud.

Deloitte, the audit and consulting firm, said in a report last year that security threats to customer account and other information were on the rise. The good news: Companies are taking notice.

The number of companies that said they didn't spend enough on security fell to 36 percent in 2010 from 56 percent the year before. The survey found that 67 percent of U.S. banks are making encryption, a process to protect digital information, a top initiative.

Still, Deloitte also reported that of all nations, the United States had the most financial institutions that were still "catching up" on security, as opposed to being ready or "on plan." And the number of high-profile attacks in recent weeks is frightening.

Tyler Lesthaeghe, a senior at Iowa State University, got a call from Citi on a Saturday morning two weeks ago and was told that his credit card number had been stolen. No fraudulent charges were made, and he

received a new card two days later.

Lesthaeghe’s case appears unrelated to the attack that Citi disclosed Thursday. Credit card information can be stolen in ways other than a direct attack on the bank, from sophisticated attacks elsewhere in the network that processes card payments to a corrupt waiter who writes down the numbers.

He says he expects this sort of thing to happen more often in the Internet age and checks his credit report regularly and his account statements every month.

"You have to be diligent about it," he says. "It seems like large amounts of credit card numbers are getting stolen. It’s kind of scary to hear that."

Security experts say there are several steps you can take to protect yourself:

* Check your credit report regularly to make sure stolen information isn’t being used to open new accounts. That scenario is unlikely in the Citi case because the hackers didn’t get enough information, but it’s good to check anyway.

"Where consumers have to be very concerned is when information like their date of birth, their Social Security number or their mother’s maiden name is breached," says Tom Osherwitz, chief privacy officer at ID Analytics.

Everyone is entitled to a free annual report from each of the three major credit reporting companies, Experian, Equifax and TransUnion. Those reports can be accessed at annualcreditreport.com, which also explains how to set fraud alerts. Ordering one every few months and rotating the companies essentially allows you to check your credit regularly for free.

* Vary the user names and passwords on your online accounts, and make sure to change any user names and passwords that match those in an account that may have been hacked.

* Third-party services will monitor accounts established in your name and alert you to something suspicious. If you decide to pay for one, make sure it covers all three credit bureaus and tells you about all activity in a timely manner. Otherwise, it’s not worth the money.

* If you are the victim of identify theft, report it to the authorities. Details on how to do that are at onguardonline.gov, a security site developed by several federal agencies.

FBI Director Says To Boost Focus on Cyber Threats

The FBI plans to sharpen its focus on the increased threat of cyber attacks over the next two years, FBI Director Robert Mueller said on Wednesday, in the wake of a recent attack on Google’s email system.

"We will increasingly put emphasis on addressing cyber threats in all of the variations," Mueller told the Senate Judiciary Committee, which was

considering an extension of his 10-year term by two years.

Stigma Puts Many Firms Off Reporting Cyber Attacks

Wary of alarming customers, many firms never report the kind of cyber attacks suffered by Sony, Google and others - and as long as the stigma holds, tackling the growing problem may prove impossible. Data theft is a menace that looms especially large, given companies' increasing reliance on online storage. At risk can be cutting-edge copyrights, privileged commercial information such as tips on takeover bids and - perhaps most crucially for a business's reputation - customers' personal details.

Computer security and corporate intelligence specialists say they are often sworn to secrecy by firms scared of the potential reaction of corporate partners and investors.

Some companies, said experts gathered at a cyber security conference in London last week organized by the EastWest Spell Institute, may not know the extent of their own exposure.

"One of the reasons we do not know the scale of this is that organizations are embarrassed to reveal the impact," BT chairman Sir Michael Rake said in a speech.

Speakers called for greater transparency, but few were willing to discuss attacks on their own systems in detail publicly. Sometimes, experts say, that extends to simply not looking for problems.

"Companies often don't understand the threats and if they do, they hide it," said Natalia Kapersky, co-founder of Russian software security firm Kapersky Labs.

While some accuse IT security experts of talking up the threat to boost business, most agree the problem is on the rise. Hackers - whether criminals, state-linked spies or those in between - are all seen increasing in sophistication.

Recent weeks saw a host of high-profile attacks. Sony probably suffered the worst damage to its reputation, with the personal details of millions of Playstation users compromised and hackers crowing about other data losses.

Other high-profile victims of hacking attempts include defense giant Lockheed Martin and Internet firm Google, with security experts in both cases pointing the finger at hackers in China. Chinese officials angrily deny this, particularly any suggestion of official complicity.

But most specialists say that is only the tip of the iceberg, with little consensus on tackling the problem.

Firms often understand so little about the threat facing them that they do not even know how much money they are losing. The difficulty in putting a price on lost prestige complicates this further.

"Everyone is getting attacked but no one is talking about it," said Vartan Sarkissian, CEO of security firm Knightsbridge Cybersystems.

"If you can’t value the cost of the attacks, you don’t know how much you can spend to prevent them ... We need a way of sharing information anonymously."

Some argue the answer may be some form of regulation in which companies are required to divulge much more about security breaches. But in the short term, experts say the importance of good electronic defenses is finally getting through.

"I think we’ve reached a tipping point," Melissa Hathaway, a former U.S. National Security Council cyber security chief who now heads her own consultancy, told Reuters at the conference.

"With the recent breaches ... and increased reporting of the issues firms will be working harder to manage their risks and limit their liability."

But global companies say that while new national policies on cyber security - such as the new U.S. doctrine published by the White House - are welcome, more global coordination is needed between governments and firms.

"Critical to this is the free passage of information, not just between companies and also between governments and intelligence agencies," said Matthew Kirk, external relations manager for UK-listed mobile telecom operator Vodafone.

"Understandably, companies are not used to sharing information with their closest competitors but they are the ones they need to share with the most," he said.

Several security experts pointed to the example of the insurance sector, where firms share information in a way that still largely allows open competition.

"What happened with the insurance industry was that they realized they were losing so much money through fraud it no longer made sense to pass the problem from company to company," said Martin Sutherland, CEO of defense firm BAE subsidiary Detica. "I think cyber is a few years behind that."

But some experts say deterring many cyber attacks is often not all that difficult. The trick, they say, is to raise their defenses to the level where it is no longer cost-effective for hackers to penetrate and they simply seek another target.

Matt Bross, a former security chief at credit card firm MasterCard whowho’ss now chief technical officer for Chinese telecom company Huawei, said his approach to stopping hacking had always been simple.

"The aim was to raise the cost of entry so copying a credit card cost more than forging $100 bill," he said. "If you raise the cost of entry of a threat, the threat will go another way."

Jobs Takes Leave from Leave for Apple Event

Apple Inc. CEO Steve Jobs re-emerged from his latest medical leave Monday

to show off the company’s latest innovations and sustain the hope that he eventually will return to dream up more ways to reshape technology.

The highlight, as usual, came at the end of Jobs’ presentation. He was on stage for less than 30 minutes during a nearly two-hour event that primarily featured his subordinates.

Ever the showman, Job announced that Apple had struck licensing agreements with all the major recording labels on a new music synching system.

It will allow people to put all the songs they have ever bought from the company’s iTunes store on up to 10 devices. All future iTunes purchases also will be automatically sent to all the devices, too. None of the transfers will require devices to be plugged into a single computer. It will automatically happen over wireless connections.

"Keeping all those devices in sync is driving us crazy," Jobs said.

Jobs’ keynote address at a conference for application developers marked his first on-stage appearance since he unveiled the latest version of Apple’s tablet computer, the iPad, three months ago.

It comes five months after Jobs went on his third medical leave of absence in the past seven years to deal with an unspecified medical issue. He has previously survived pancreatic cancer and undergone a liver transplant.

Unlike a six-month leave in 2009, Jobs, 56, hasn’t said when he is coming back to work. The uncertainty make his every appearance even more of a spectacle because people don’t know if it will be the last time they will see one of the world’s most influential CEOs and cultural taste-makers.

Looking as frail as he did in his last appearance in March, Jobs didn’t discuss his health Monday. That wasn’t unusual; he has consistently treated his health as a personal matter and insisted that Apple’s board remains mum, too, much to the frustration of some shareholders who believe they deserve know more the condition of the leader.

Apple, though, tried to strike an optimistic note by playing the James Brown song, "I Feel Good," as a prelude to Jobs’ appearance. When the song concluded, Jobs stepped on stage to a standing ovation and a "We love you" shout from one man in the audience. Jobs smiled and said the warm reception "helped."

After his presentation, Jobs talked briefly with Connor Ellison, a 13-year-old boy he met earlier this year at a group that supports liver transplants. When Ellison asked Jobs how he was feeling, the Apple CEO said "I feel good" and posed for a picture. Afterward, Ellison said he and Jobs share the same doctor. He also said Jobs had invited him to come down from his home in Folsom, Calif., to attend the event.

While he was on stage, Jobs seemed animated as he gestured frequently and pace about the stage. He appeared to walk up the steps of the stage slowly after sitting down in the audience a couple times while other Apple executives demonstrated features of the iCloud service.

"He delivered all the key points, but it doesn’t look like he is getting any better," said veteran Silicon Valley technology analyst Rob Enderle.

Jobs didn’t look much different from his March appearance for the iPad 2, said Tim Bajarin, president of Creative Strategies and a longtime Apple watcher. Bajarin downplayed Jobs’ limited time on stage on Monday, saying he "almost always" relies on underlings to handle the bulk of demos at developers’ conferences.

Having Jobs appear at major events remains important to preserving Apple’s market value and keeping shareholders at bay, Enderle said.

"As long as he is still showing up and looking like he can still do the job, that helps keep the pressure off the board to replace him," Enderle said.

Tim Cook, Apple’s chief operating officer, has been running the company, just as he has through all of Jobs’ medical leaves. Jobs still has a say in major decisions.

The new music-synching service Jobs announced Monday could be a boon for consumers because more than 18 billion songs already have been bought through iTunes.

Jobs also unveiled a way for most people to keep their entire music collections on the company’s computers without going through the time-consuming hassle of uploading each song over the Internet.

The $25-per-year service, called iTunes Match, will allow people to play their personal jukeboxes on any device with iTunes software instead of keeping them tethered to a personal computer that must be synced with other devices. It’s aimed at people who have transferred their CD collections to the iTunes library on their own computers.

The music streaming is part of broader service, called iCloud, that represents Apple’s attempts to persuade the tens of millions of people who own iPhones, iPads and iPod Touches to store documents, video, photos in a massive data center that the company built in North Carolina. The allure for consumers is to have all their digital content available on any device running Apple’s mobile software, called iOS.

For Apple, the iCloud service represents a response to similar storage services offered by Google Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. Although those rivals have a head start, Apple is betting it can make concept of online storage more appealing and convenient.

It will take a few more months to find out if Apple is taking the next step in the evolution of digital music and Internet storage. ITunes Match won’t be available until the fall when Apple plans to release iOS 5.

Apple announced it will release the next version of its operating system for Mac computers, called Lion, next month. A preview of that software, which will cost $29.99, was handled by two of other Apple executives. That will give Apple a jump on Microsoft Corp., which recently said it won’t release the next version of its Windows operating system until next year.

HTC Flyer Tablet Mates with Slippery Pen

Is it better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all? That’s the question posed by a new tablet computer that takes aim at one of the deficiencies of the iPad: that it’s difficult to write on it with a stylus or pen.

The HTC Flyer is a $500 tablet with a 7-inch screen. At a glance, it’s not much different from the other tablets that are scrambling to compete with Apple Inc.’s iPad.

The iPad and all its copycats are designed to sense the touch of a finger. The screen layer that does this looks for big, blunt, electrically conductive objects such as fingers. It doesn’t sense small, sharp ones like pens.

That’s why third-party styluses for the iPad are blunt rubbery sticks. They’re essentially imitation fingers. They’re not very good for drawing, but some people find them better than nothing.

The Flyer has the same finger-sensing screen layer. But it backs this up with a second one, which looks for the movement of a specially designed, battery-powered pen.

The pen moves fluidly over the screen, with a relatively sharp (but non-scratchy) point. The pen even senses how hard it’s being pressed on the screen. The tablet responds by making the line thicker or thinner.

The pen makes the Flyer a great notepad and a decent sketchpad - at least one that’s better than the iPad. The Flyer includes a note-taking application that’s compatible with the Evernote online storage service.

You can jot off a note and send it by email. The recipient will see your handwriting in an image attachment. You can also snap a picture with one of the Flyer’s two cameras and color over the image with the pen. In the e-book reading application, you can scribble notes in the margins and underline with the pen.

Unfortunately, the Flyer lacks the broad range of sketching and doodling apps that exist for the iPad. You can’t dispense with finger-typing on the on-screen keyboard because the tablet doesn’t understand what you’re writing. Because no other tablets work with this type of pen, only apps from manufacturer HTC Corp. are compatible.

The other sad thing about the Flyer is that HTC has chosen to treat the pen as an optional accessory. For the $500 you plunk down at Best Buy - the same price as the larger, more capable entry-level iPad - you don’t get the pen. It’s $80 extra. Yet it’s a mystery why anyone would buy a Flyer without it.

Worse, HTC makes zero effort at keeping pen and owner united. There is no slot on the tablet to hold the pen when not in use. There’s no case for the Flyer that will hold the pen. The pen doesn’t even have a little loop that would let you tie it to the tablet or something else that won’t get lost.

In two weeks of use, I dropped the pen a dozen times. I’m proud that I managed not to lose it, but I doubt I could go another two weeks. I would then have the privilege of buying a replacement for $80, a price for which I could get about 300 Bic pens.

In that context, "never to have loved at all" looks like the cheaper

option. Paper pads and ballpoint pens, too.

Sprint Nextel Corp. will sell a version of the Flyer it will call EVO View 4G, starting June 24. It will have 32 gigabytes of memory, double the storage in Best Buy's version, and it will have access to Sprint's data network. In a smart move, Sprint is including the pen, but only "for a limited time." However, buyers will need to sign up for two years of wireless data service from Sprint, so the final price will be considerably higher.

Some other things to consider: The Flyer runs Google Inc.'s Android 2.3 software, which in plain English means that it uses the same software as a lot of smartphones, but not other recent iPad rivals. They use a more recent package, "Honeycomb," that's designed for tablets. HTC promises to upgrade the Flyer's software to Honeycomb soon, helping it stay compatible with tablet-specific apps.

In my video-playing test, I got 7.5 hours of play time out of the Flyer, which isn't very good for a tablet. The iPad 2 gets ten hours; the Asus Eee Pad Transformer gets nine.

The Transformer is a better example of a tablet that tries to compete with the iPad by doing something new - in that case, by doubling as a small, elegant laptop thanks to a clever accessory keyboard.

The pen-sensing layer of the Flyer could be a great addition to the world of tablets, but someone really needs to figure out how to make the pen cheaper or easier to keep track of. To end on another corny quote, "If you love something, set it free; if it comes back it's yours, if it doesn't, it never was" is not a phrase to live by when it comes to $80 pens.

HP's TouchPad Will Debut July 1

Hewlett Packard Co will begin selling its TouchPad on July 1 in the United States for $499.99, debuting the first tablet computer powered by Palm's operating software.

Jumping into the tablet computer craze triggered by Apple Inc's iPad, HP said on Thursday it start taking orders on June 19 in North America and Europe.

The Wi-Fi version of the gadget hits store shelves July 1 in the United States, followed by Britain, Ireland, France and Germany a few days after.

Canada gets the tablet, run on Palm's WebOS operating system, in mid-July, followed by Italy, Spain, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Singapore later in 2011.

HP bought Palm last summer for $1.2 billion, hoping to combine its WebOS software with a plethora of devices from smartphones to printers, gambling that there is room for yet another mobile software platform.

HP faces an uphill battle in a mobile market already dominated by Apple and devices based on Google Inc's Android.

Kotick in Final Talks To Buy Out Myspace

An investor group including Activision Blizzard Chief Executive Officer Bobby Kotick is in final talks to take a controlling stake in News Corp’s social network site Myspace, according to three people familiar with the matter.

Kotick’s involvement is personal and nothing to do with Activision at this stage, the people said.

Kotick was approached by the investor group in recent weeks and has not yet made a full commitment to the Myspace project, one of the people said.

If he does get involved his stake is likely to be very small, two of the sources said.

Activision is best known for its ’Call of Duty’ war game franchise.

There remain others in the race, according to the first person, but the Kotick group is now the favored bidder.

Under the terms of the discussions, News Corp would retain an equity stake, possibly of about 20 percent, one of the sources said.

News Corp, which paid $580 million for Myspace in 2005, had hoped to do a deal valuing Myspace at about $100 million, but sources said in April that it was unlikely to achieve that target.

Like Friendster, Myspace was a pioneer of the social networking space between 2005 and 2007, but it soon lost out to Facebook, now the market leader in social networking.

Last year News Corp relaunched Myspace as a social entertainment site with a focus on music, movies and celebrities.

Jobs To Cupertino: We Want A Spaceship-Shaped, 12K Capacity Building As Our New Apple Campus

After having a banner WWDC start yesterday, Apple founder and CEO Steve Jobs humbly presented his idea for a new Apple campus at the Cupertino City Council today. Jobs wants to build one building that will hold 12,000 Apple employees on a former Hewlett-Packard property in the area between Tantau North Wolfe, Homestead and the 280 freeway. "It s a little like a spaceship landed," Jobs says. No kidding.

Jobs began the presentation referring to the fact that Apple is growing "like a weed," and that its current campus at D Anza and the 280 isn t enough - fitting only about 2,800 people. Apple currently rents buildings to house its other 6,700 employees in the area. The new building will augment the current campus.

Paving the way for these plans, Apple purchased about 100 acres from Hewlett Packard in 2010 and added them to the 50 it owns adjacent. Jobs says he has corralled "some great architects - some of the best in the world" to come up with a design that will house 12,000 people in one four story high building

on the property. The area is now mainly apricot orchards.

With the futuristic design Apple apparently is relying heavily on its experience building retail stores, and it will be creating one massive piece of curved glass if the proposal goes through. "There s not a single straight piece of glass in this building," Jobs says. The parking will be underground.

Jobs also wants the building to function as its own power source, with an "energy center" as its primary source of power ("with natural gas and other ways that are cleaner and cheaper"), using the grid as a backup.

The campus will include amenities like its own auditorium similar to Apple s current Town Hall ("We ve got an auditorium, cause we put on presentations, much like we did yesterday but we have to go to San Francisco to do them.") and a cafeteria that will feed 3,000 people at one sitting.

"We do have a shot at building the best office building in the world," Jobs told the Council members, "Architecture students will come here to see this." Ideally Apple wants to move into the campus in 2015.

The individual members of the Cupertino City Council seemed like they were in awe the entire time the infamously charismatic Apple CEO spoke (which isn t surprising), asking Jobs for free Wifi and iPads for constituents as well as for an Apple store that s actually in Cupertino and not in the Valley or Los Gatos. Jobs shyly responded to the requests, "I think we bring a lot more than free Wifi."

Key facts about the new Apple campus:

- Design will include a courtyard in the middle and curved glass all the way around.
- Jobs is planning on transforming an area that s 20% landscaping to 80% landscaping by putting most of the building s parking underground.
- There are 3,700 trees in the area at the moment, Jobs has hired an arborist from Stanford to take the area up to 6,000 trees.
- The plan is to build a four-story high building and four-story parking structure.
- The campus will incude an energy center, and natural gas will be the primary source of power, using the grid as backup.
- There will be an auditorium, fitness center and some R & D buildings.
- Jobs plans a 40% increase in Apple employees going from 9,500 today to 13,000 in 2015.
- He wants to increase the campus space 20% from 2.6 million to 3.1 million square feet.
- Landscaping will increase 60% from 3,700 to 6,000.
- Surface parking will decrease 90% from 9,800 to 1,200 .
- The building footprint will decrease 30% from 1.4 million to 1 million.
- Cafeterias will fit 3,000 people at a sitting.
- The whole building will be designed with the utmost concern for employee safety.
- Apple currently has 20 buses running on bio-diesel fuel for its employees and Jobs thinks that system will work well with the new campus.
- The plan for the new design will submitted asap. Jobs hopes to break ground next year and eventually move in 2015.

Update: Cupertino Mayor Gilbert Wong says "there s no chance" they re going to say no to this thing. Mission accomplished.

Is Internet Access a Human Right?

In the face of government crackdowns on the free flow of information, Frank La Rue, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, has released a report stressing that Internet access ought to be an essential right for all citizens.

La Rue's report connects Internet access with freedom of expression, a right guaranteed in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Rapporteur urges governments to open up Web access by developing action plans that make the Internet more available, accessible, and affordable.

"There should be as little restriction as possible to the flow of information via the Internet, except in a few, very exceptional, and limited circumstances prescribed by international human rights law," La Rue said in a statement. "Essentially, this means that any restriction must be clearly provided by law, and proven to be necessary and the least intrusive means available for the purpose of protecting the rights of others."

The report raised concerns about surveillance powers enacted under the pretense of counter-terrorism or national security. As a tool that enables the advocacy for change - not to mention holding those in power accountable - La Rue stressed that the Internet has ignited fear among some governments.

"Legitimate expression continues to be criminalized in many states, illustrated by the fact that in 2010, more than 100 bloggers were imprisoned," La Rue warned. "Governments are using increasingly sophisticated technologies to block content, and to monitor and identify activists and critics."

In Syria a government crackdown on the Internet is on full display.

According to Renesys, a service that monitors Internet connectivity, as much as two-thirds of all Syrian networks went down on Friday. Access was reportedly restored on Saturday.

"In recent months, we have seen a growing movement of people around the world who are advocating for change - for justice, equality, accountability of the powerful and better respect for human rights," La Rue said. "However, the unique features of the Internet, which allow individuals to spread information instantly, to organize themselves, and to inform the world about situations of injustice and inequality, have also created fear among Governments and the powerful."

The UN Special Rapporteur's full report is, appropriately, available online.

The report earned praise from privacy groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT).

"The report by the Special Rapporteur raises concerns about justifying broad surveillance powers under the name of national security or counter-terrorism," EFF said in a statement. "La Rue should be commended for questioning the ostensible motives for online surveillance."

"As Rapporteur La Rue affirms, the Internet's unique ability to provide ample space for individual free expression can lead to the strengthening of other human rights, including political, economic and social rights," said Cynthia Wong, Director of CDT's Project on Global Internet Freedom. "In order for these rights to be realized, governments, civil society and industry must all continue to build on the work begun by the Special Rapporteur."

NJ Court: No Shield Law for Message Board Posters

People who post to online message boards don't have the same protections as mainstream journalists when it comes to keeping their sources secret, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled Tuesday.

The court said in a unanimous ruling against a Washington state woman that New Jersey's shield law provides broad protection to the news media and is not limited to traditional news outlets like newspapers and magazines, but does not apply to message board posters.

"To ensure that the privilege does not apply to every self-appointed newsperson, the Legislature requires that other means of disseminating news be 'similar' to traditional news sources to qualify for the law's coverage," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner wrote for the court in its 5-0 ruling.

The case involved a New Jersey software company named Too Much Media, which sued the woman for defamation and wanted her to reveal sources she had cited in message board posts. The company makes software used by many online porn sites to track traffic from other sites to determine how much those sites should be paid in commissions.

Three years ago, the woman, Shellee Hale, posted comments on an online bulletin board that accused the Freehold-based company of engaging in fraudulent practices and of threatening the life of someone who divulged details about it, according to a court filing.

Hale, of Bellevue, Wash., claimed she was gathering information for an investigation of organized crime infiltration of the online porn industry and planned to publish her findings on a website and possibly in a book. She invoked the shield law to avoid identifying the person who was threatened and another source who first told her of the threats.

"I'm not traditional. I'm a citizen journalist," Hale told The Associated Press previously. "As citizens we are told, 'If you see something, say something,' and I have a duty to report. I think what I do is really important."

New Jersey's law is one of the broadest in the country in its protection of journalists' sources. But it dates to 1977 - long before the Internet brought a sea change to news distribution.

The law protects anyone "engaged on, engaged in, connected with, or employed by news media for the purpose of gathering, procuring, transmitting, compiling, editing or disseminating news for the general public, newspapers, magazines, press associations, news agencies, wire services, radio, television or other similar printed, photographic,

mechanical or electronic means of disseminating news to the general public."

In Tuesday’s ruling, however, the court concluded the material at the heart of the case was posted to online message boards, which the justices said are simply forums for discussion and don’t fit the definition of news media as described by the law.

"We never believed any court would find that Ms. Hale was a journalist," said Joel N. Kreizman, an attorney for Too Much Media. "What the court found was that these message boards are online conversations and are no more journalistic than any other conversations."

He added: "If the court were to have considered her a member of the media, anyone could say they are a member of the media to protect their sources."

Hale contended that her comments were "small brief parts" of articles she intended to, but never did, publish. Her attorney, Jeffrey M. Pollock, said the ruling was a "significant change for a state that prided itself on having broadest shield law in country."

Kelly McBride, a senior faculty member on journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, said the ruling narrowly dealt with online message boards.

Likewise, Susan Keith, an assistant professor of journalism at Rutgers University, said the ruling was specifically constructed.

"This appears to me to be a pretty narrow ruling about posters to online message boards not being able to claim reporter’s privilege under the provisions of the New Jersey shield law," Keith said. "We might want to watch for a blogger to cite that if he or she wanted to claim coverage under the shield law in a future case."

Some questioned whether posting on a message board had any less journalistic value than a website or blog post.

"What makes journalism journalism is not the format but the content," said Kurt Opsahl, an attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that takes on cyberspace civil liberties issues.

"Where news is gathered for dissemination to the public, it is journalism - regardless of whether it is printed on paper or distributed through the Internet."

Pennsylvania School Sued (Again) Over Webcam Spying

A Pennsylvania school district has been hit with another lawsuit over the remote activation of webcams on school-issued laptops.

Joshua Levin, a graduate of Harriton High School, filed suit against the Lower Merion School District Monday for surreptitiously snapping webcam photos that left Levin "shocked, humiliated, and severely emotionally distressed at what he saw."

At issue are school-issued Mac laptops provided to 2,300 students at Harriton High School. Unbeknownst to those students and their parents, the laptops were equipped with tracking software that could remotely activate the computer's webcam to take photos of the user, as well as capture screen shots. It was intended as a means to locate lost or stolen laptops, but was apparently activated in more questionable circumstances as well.

The tracking software came to light when Blake Robbins, a student at the high school, was allegedly called into the assistant principal's office and accused of taking drugs. The evidence was reportedly screen shots of Robbins from the school-issued laptop that appeared to show him taking pills. Robbins said he was actually eating candy.

Robbins' family sued, as did a second student, Jalil Hassan. In October, the school district reached a settlement with Robbins and Hassan for a total of $610,000 after the district's insurance carrier, Graphic Arts, agreed to cover more than $1.2 million in fees and costs associated with the litigation.

When the school district investigated the case, it found other incidents of webcam spying, and notified the students involved, including Levin. According to the lawsuit, filed in Eastern Pennsylvania District Court, Levin's younger brother commented on a light near the webcam that appeared to go on and off at odd times. His mother "dismissed the idea as absurd," but it appears he was right.

On June 8, 2010, the school district's lawyer sent Levin's family a letter that said his school-issued laptop had captured 4,404 webcam photographs and 3,978 screen shots between September 22, 2008 and March 12, 2009. The letter gave Levin the option to view the shots, which he did on June 17. He was "shocked, humiliated, and severely emotionally distressed at what he saw," according to the suit. It did not elaborate about what types of images were captured, except to say that Levin kept the device in his bedroom, as well as throughout the homes of his mother and father.

Levin is demanding damages and costs.

In the wake of the other lawsuits, the school district apologized and admitted that it should have informed students and parents about the software. An updated school policy now requires the district to get a student's permission before activating the monitoring software.

The school district told the AP that Levin's lawsuit is "solely motivated by monetary interests and a complete waste of the taxpayer's dollars."

Senators Target Internet Narcotics

Two U.S. senators said Sunday they will ask federal authorities to crack down on a secretive narcotics market operated on the Internet with anonymous sales and untraceable currency.

Heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines are among the drugs being sold in the well-protected website apparently operating for just a few months.

Sens. Charles Schumer of New York and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, both

Democrats, said they asked the Justice Department and Drug Enforcement Administration to shut down and investigate the website, often referred to as the Silk Road after an ancient Asian trade route.

"This audacious website should be shut down immediately," Manchin said.

"Never before has a website so brazenly peddled illegal drugs online," Schumer said. "By cracking down on the website immediately, we can help stop these drugs from flooding our streets."

The senators planned to release their letters to the agencies on Sunday.

A key to the illicit trade is use of a network by buyers and sellers that conceals their identity.

Websites including Gawker have reported on the site.

Schumer said the website began operating in February and uses "layers" of secrecy to thwart authorities. Sellers are told to make shipments in vacuum-sealed bags to avoid drug-detecting dogs.

You Have Exactly Three Passwords, Don’t You?

You have exactly three passwords, don’t you? The first is one you use for all the logins that you don’t think house anything worth stealing. You use it when you are signing up for a Web site that you might not visit ever again. It’s the default password you deploy when you’re required to "create a free account" to read an online newspaper or RSVP to an e-invitation.

The second one is medium security. It’s probably fewer than eight characters long. It might be alpha-only or alpha-numeric, but does not contain special characters. You probably use this same password for both email and Facebook. And it’s possible you don’t have a medium security password at all, so let’s skip to the third.

The third password is what you use for your bank accounts - all of them. Or worse, you have one password that you use for everything.

Too many of us reuse passwords, and the recent Sony hacks should serve as a call to action to change not only the passwords themselves, but the methods we use to create and remember them.

Software architect and Microsoft MVP Troy Hunt performed an independent data analysis of the leaked passwords from the Sony hacks and compared it with another data set that was made available after Gawker’s commenting database was hacked in December 2010.

One of the most shocking things he found (although it’s not shocking if you are a password reuser yourself) is that 88 people had both a Gawker and Sony account with the same email address, and 67 percent of them used the same password. It’s a small sample size, but an interesting figure nonetheless. And a Security Week study last year reported that 75 percent of people use the same password for Facebook and an email account.

What’s more, when Hunt looked through the Sony files, he found that among users who had two Sony accounts (e.g., Sony Playstation and

SonyPictures) with the same email address, 92 percent used the same password for both.

I'm painfully guilty of password reuse, although I made a New Year's resolution to try and fix it after my Hotmail account (which I consider not highly important) got hacked late last year. Luckily, that email account didn't have many actual contacts or private information, as I use it for newsletters and miscellaneous sign-ups, but it was still an eye-opening moment. The problem was that I used the same three-password system described above, and someone, somewhere, got a hold of one of my other username and password combos, probably with a hotmail.com email address attached to it, too. It wouldn't have been hard to guess (or /try/) logging into Hotmail with the same credentials.

Imagine my surprise when I read the same three-password method outlined in a comment to Hunt's blog post. Way too many of us are guilty of using the same system. People think alike and come up with similar plans. It's not just me.

What people don't seem to realize is just how many Web sites and services have your password. Case in point: Another bit of shocking news from the Sony hack was that Sony stored passwords in text files! If a major international corporation doesn't take any precautions to encrypt the passwords, what can we reasonably expect other sites and services to be doing?

The reality is most people have created dozens if not hundreds of usernames and passwords throughout their digital lifetimes. Is it reasonable to have to have a unique password for every single thing? And do I really care if someone hacks my long-abandoned Plurk account? There are conditions under which I'll accept that risk for the sake of being able to remember certain passwords quickly.

Security gurus tout the relevance of password managers, which generate unique passwords for you and store them under one password-protected program, but even they can be cumbersome. LastPass 1.72 Premium is PCMag's Editors' Choice for password managers. It keeps your encrypted password collection online and works across Windows, Mac, and Linux machines.

But how many people, really, will use a password manager? I think it's more likely that a better way of protecting personal data will come along well before password managers become widely adopted. There has got to be a simpler way. Until then, we'll have to invent our own systems for developing passwords that are unique but memorable. I've heard the advice to come up with a complicated base password (say, X*8ippo) and append to it some combination of letters as used in each URL of the site where you're logging in. Given this example, we might have passwords like *ue*X*8ippo*JE* for *Je*tBl*ue* and *ix*X*8ippo*NE* for *Ne*tfl*ix*, and so on. It's still crack-able, but it's not an open door.

Either give in and get a password manager (did I mention LastPass is free?) or come up with a new password system that meets other suggested requirements and change all your logins every six months at least.

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